

A good research piece, as Desai has given us, will raise questions: what is the explanation of the divergence between the perception of the residents and of the investigators? Are there any norms against which the perception can be measured and thus, the objective truth is identified and the validity of perception is obtained? The reviewer searched in vain the logical or empirical assumption underlying the twelve hypotheses.

Like a genuine scholar that Desai undoubtedly is, she frankly states the limitations of data and the evaluation of findings, methodology, data and future research possibilities. She admits that the measurement of perception is a problem because of its qualitative nature. Nonetheless, she is able to distinguish a Jain pol from a Muslim pol with the help of perception findings, a finding that can be of inestimable value in understanding the seemingly inter-

minable communal tensions and conflicts. Desai with her characteristic candour identifies and expresses several difficulties in basing environmental planning on perception studies. Not many scholars are aware of or willing to submit to their colleagues the weaknesses of their findings. The tables, maps and sketches are leaders in new thinking and many will study them with profit. One very brief question: are there really no castes among the Muslims or social groups akin to their Hindu counterparts?

Anjana Desai's book should be a required reading for urban social geographers for she is, in essence, providing us with another and deeper insight to the functioning of society in space as understood by its members. It will come handy to the urban environmental planners if they are sincere about the success of their plans.

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CHRISTALLER ON THE MAHARASHTRA LANDSCAPE

CENTRAL PLACES IN WESTERN INDIA

by
Jaymala Diddee
(1984)

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Christaller, if he were alive today, would have expressed his happiness and surprise on a book demonstrating the viable application of his seminal contribution to a land as remote from southern Germany, in history, culture, and economy, as Maharashtra. This is one of those rare good books, scholarly and readable, which have grown out of doctoral dissertations.

Through a brief but pointed and comprehensive (even eclectic) review of the central place theory Diddee escorts us over the land of Western India (upper Bhima

Basin) indicating the salient features relevant to its central places: for once among the Indian books we are mercifully spared the ordeal of wading through a gazetteer! A native of the region, Diddee follows a self-prescribed limit, this much and no more.

There are many items, may be even the 'first', which will sustain and invigorate our interest as we leisurely move through the text uninterrupted by jarring notes of quantification. There is an intelligent discussion on the evolution of central places in the region going back to 7th century

B. C. and coming up to our times, and capped by a very convincing and useful heuristic, classificatory, temporal model of the settlement system in the region: an innovation that should and would soon be a reference and imitated widely. There is great merit in distinguishing the settlements evolved from early habitats from those developed in the 20th century without history of evolution, as depicted in the very detailed, multi-layered model.

There follow, thereafter, substantial discussions on distribution of central places, occupational structure and functional organization, centrality and hierarchy of central places, service areas, growth characteristics of central places, case studies, and central places and regional planning: a sumptuous fare, an unending whetting of intellectual appetite.

In most of these chapters the substantive, informative parts are uniformly woven through the determinants, empirically validated, and correlative analyses. There are unexpected hypotheses: agricultural productivity and the distribution of central places. Her investigations clearly suggest that the size, number, and pattern of central places are not governed by one single factor but by several factors operating in combination. She does cast her net wide to include the examination of the role of urbanization, industrialization, and accessibility in the patterning of central places.

Diddee devotes two entire chapters to occupational structure and functional organization and centrality and hierarchy of central places. In the former her essential focus is on the functional classification of central places and their functions and in the latter the burden is on measuring centrality by an empirical formula (really location quotient) and the identification of the hierarchy. This leads to the delimitation of service areas and their properties, specially their size, density, and distribution. Diddee is fully aware of the debates on hierarchy, rank-size rule, and demarcation of service

areas and selects the method which is easy to handle and which responds favourably to available data. One nagging question remains unanswered: is hierarchy merely a classificatory arrangement or an exposition of functional inter-linkages in their spatial translations?

Diddee is not satisfied with regional generalisations and moves to their validations in case studies; an exemplary addition to the existing literature. She wants to establish also that her work has relevance to the understanding and solving of the problems of regional development: This chapter comes at the end of the entire discussion. Although she proposes a set of central places for regional development planning purposes, Diddee does not really go into two related aspects: the functional gaps, their identification and removal, and their exact nature; and, the role of political-economy and administrative exigency in the new network of central places. In brief, where could the people, their political spokesmen, and their administrators like the central places to be and their central functions?

Many questions keep on rattling in mind: Why has Diddee chosen the Western India for her investigation? What were the initial questions that prodded her to this region and to its central places?

We are not told of the specific reasons for the choice of the region, how similar to or different is it from Southern Germany, and what modifications of Christaller are needed to make it applicable to another region. It would be interesting to know whether a different set of central places would have been identified if the questionnaires were to be directed to the residents of all the settlements asking them to inform of the places they visit to buy goods and services which are not available in their own. Similarly, one would have liked to know the characteristic features of the central places of the region that would set them apart from those of the adjacent regions.

Methodological quibblings apart, Christaller strides strong and royal through the book. It is a solid contribution, evidence of sustained and critical thinking, and very substantive in nature. For those of the Indian geographers, doubting Thomases, who stubbornly persist in their rejection of Christaller for Indian areas and for those who are searching for support and salience Diddee's book should be a required reading. It will be an antidote for the former and a model for the latter.

One can read through the narrative, written in a easy, relaxed, and graceful English, without ever being alerted by the impending intrusion of the overwhelming, recurrent ghost of quantification. Christaller wanted to describe to us a landscape, an economic landscape, if one pleases, and do it in a manner that would excite our feelings and arouse our curiosity (remember Sauer's 'naive curiosity'). Diddee does it for Maharashtra. Diddee's arguments and critiques of the formulations already proposed are as balanced as they are graceful. There is an

impressive discipline in organisation and economy of expression that would strike a discerning scholar as much as they would render easy the comprehension of analysis, findings, and conclusions. There is grace the cover design, printing, and get-up and, most fortunately, the maps are legible, and, the almost flawless printing (would that be all would like to get our books published by the University of Poona press) add to the pleasure of reading. If the price is reasonable to attract a prospective geographer-buyer, the pages are held firm by the binding.

The reviewer genuinely fears that the book will soon be used as a model for churning out doctoral dissertations by dozens, sniffing out the desire for innovations (Diddee has not raised questions which she has not answered neither those which would have been leaders) if any. That cannot be a happy feeling for the author but that has to be the manifest destiny of a pioneering work.

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